

## Transcription: Horace Barron

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*Today is Monday, July 6, 2009. My name is James Crabtree, and I'll be interviewing Mr. Horace Barron. This interview is taking place by phone. I'm at the General Land Office Building in downtown Austin, and Mr. Barron is at his home in Taylor, Texas, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today and to share with us some of your memories and your accounts of your time in the service. This interview can go as long or as short as you'd like it to go. Usually one of the first questions we always ask is just for you to maybe tell us a little bit about what your life was like before you went in the military, kind of what your childhood was like, where you grew up, that sort of thing.*

**Horace Barron:** I grew up in Brazos County, Texas, and in 1936, I made my first contact with the Army as an ROTC student at Texas A&M University.

*Yes sir, and what was it that inspired you to want to go to A&M?*

**Horace Barron:** The proximity of it to my home and the utter impossibility of having enough money to go anywhere else. I didn't know any other place existed actually.

*Yes sir. Tell us a little bit what that was like when you first got taken in and you first were exposed to the Corps of cadets and ROTC and that sort of thing.*

**Horace Barron:** Well of course at that time it was an all male school, and I thought an enormous population of kids, men and boys, but it sounds totally insignificant now. I think there were 2,000 cadets, and of course, now some are close to 50,000.

*Yeah, quite a difference, yes sir. Were you enrolled at A&M when Pearl Harbor took place?*

**Horace Barron:** I had graduated from the College of Veterinary Medicine in June of 1941, and of course, Pearl Harbor was a few months away at that time.

*Do you remember where you were the day that you learned that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?*

**Horace Barron:** I remember very well. Everybody remembers that day. I was in Port Arthur, Texas, in the practice of veterinary medicine.

*How did you learn about it?*

**Horace Barron:** I learned about it on my car radio. I don't remember, seems to me it was the night after Pearl Harbor that I heard about it on the car radio. I believe it was at night time, but I'm not sure the actual date. That would've been a day or two later.

*When you learned about that, did you think that you personally would be going into the military? Did you think you would be drafted or you would volunteer?*

**Horace Barron:** I was quite certain that my life would never be the same afterwards, because it hadn't occurred to me that I would in any way avoid military service after that.

*When was it that you entered the military?*

**Horace Barron:** Actually it was a couple of years later on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August of 1943. I had volunteered almost immediately after Pearl Harbor and been turned down as physically not serviceable. I had to wait a couple of years before I was accepted on a physical examination.

*Was it that you were sick or was there some other - ?*

**Horace Barron:** I was not sick and I was totally surprised to be rejected on the basis of a very rapid and irregular heartbeat.

*But then a couple of years later, I guess when they went through the same physical, was your heartbeat better, or did they simply give you a waiver and let you through?*

**Horace Barron:** I guess it got better. Nothing mentioned on my final physical before I was commissioned.

*And at that point, once you had been commissioned, did you know all along that you were going to be in the Veterinary Corps, or was that something that they found out you were a veterinarian and put you into that?*

**Horace Barron:** Well, I had applied for a commission in the Veterinary Corps, and that was the reason I got a physical. I had not been drafted, never was drafted. I was exempt because I was in an essential occupation.

*So before you went in the service, you were taking care of animals here in Texas, I take it.*

**Horace Barron:** Right, yeah, I practiced first in Port Arthur and then in Bryan until I was commissioned and inducted into the Army.

*Was it a big change for you to go into the service? Did you feel like it was pretty drastic, or were you able to make that adaptation fairly quickly?*

**Horace Barron:** It wasn't too big of a change because I had been through ROTC in the infantry, and I was fairly well acquainted with the military.

*When you got commissioned, where was the first place that the Army sent you to?*

**Horace Barron:** Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

*And was that for your first phase of training, almost like boot camp?*

**Horace Barron:** No training really, just induction, and then shipped me out. I went to an infantry camp outside of Paris, Texas. I don't even remember the name of the camp at this moment.

*During that time were you going through normal Army training or were always put almost exclusively into the Veterinary Corps type of training?*

**Horace Barron:** Well, I was really going through infantry training at the camp at Fort Sam Houston. The only training I got was just a kind of resumption of infantry training, and I was not subjected to any Veterinary Corps training until I was actually ordered overseas assignment.

*During this time, were you married or did you have a girlfriend?*

**Horace Barron:** I was married in February of 1942.

*During that time, did your wife remain behind at home?*

**Horace Barron:** Yeah, she always had to stay home. In fact, when I left to go overseas, I left her pregnant with our daughter who is now 65 years old.

*Yes sir, that's great.*

**Horace Barron:** That's a long time.

*How did your wife deal with your absence? Did she have family or friends nearby? I would imagine it was as difficult on her to have you gone.*

**Horace Barron:** I know it was very difficult for her, but she was a working girl, working as a clerk typist for the Department of Agriculture, and her family was nearby.

*So at least that helped a little bit. Where did you go to after you finished your training? You mentioned Fort Sam Houston and then you'd gone to a camp near Paris, Texas. Do you remember where you were sent after you left Paris, Texas?*

**Horace Barron:** I was sent to Camp Reynolds in Pennsylvania as just an overseas staging area, and was there only a couple of weeks, and then to Fort Patrick Henry in Virginia to await boarding, and shortly after the 1<sup>st</sup> of January of 1944, it was actually I think on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, I boarded the Empress of Scotland, which was a troop ship converted from a real nice ocean liner. I spent a month on the Empress, stopping one time in Cape Town, South Africa, and then on to Bombay, India, where we debarked.

*So it was definitely a long cruise to get to India. When was it that you first found out that you were going to the India/Burma/China Theater?*

**Horace Barron:** After we left Cape Town.

*So they had not told you until that point.*

**Horace Barron:** We had no idea where we were going when we started out.

*Did you know what your role was going to be as a veterinarian? Did you feel pretty confident going into it that you knew what your task would be?*

**Horace Barron:** Well, I knew what my classification was, but I really didn't know anything beyond that. My classification was for an animal veterinarian, and I had no idea when I would actually see any horses. But that was the only thing that I was ever really concerned with. I

didn't do any of the other possible duties that veterinarians were assigned in those days, had no relationship with any animal other than horses and mules.

*Tell us what it was like when you got to Bombay. What was your impression of India at that point?*

**Horace Barron:** Well, teeming with poverty, stricken beggars primarily, and my first impression of it is I think what everybody's is when they hit in India, the odor of the country. India I think even today has a very specific kind of odor because of the fact that they cremate most of their dead in a very crude kind of a way, over open wood fires, and also they have towers of silence where you may have heard of it, where they are simply left on the towers to be decomposed and carried away by the vultures.

*I imagine that was pretty shocking for you guys to see that the first time getting to Bombay.*

**Horace Barron:** Yeah, it was quite a shock.

*How long did you spend there in Bombay before you moved on to operations?*

**Horace Barron:** Well, I was in and around Bombay for only about two weeks, then boarded a train to drive through, to be carried all the way across India to Calcutta, and Calcutta was even more crowded and just maybe even more poverty-stricken than Bombay. At the time I hit Calcutta, there was an immense famine on, and the authorities just scoured the streets every day picking up carcasses of people who had starved to death.

*When you got over there to Bombay and then to Calcutta, at that point did you realize what your task was going to be or were you still kind of undetermined?*

**Horace Barron:** Well, I didn't know. They never tell us anything. I did not know that I was destined to be thrown over the Himalayan hump to China. They never tell you anything at all, so that just came as a surprise to me after two or three months of waiting. That's all of my Army experience practically was waiting, waiting. I don't think I ever accomplished anything of value. I did an awful lot of waiting.

*Yes sir, hurry up and wait I think is every veteran's experience to some extent.*

**Horace Barron:** And in the CBI Theater, all the people over there said that CBI Theater really stands for confusion beyond imagination.

*Yes sir. Tell us a little bit if you would about the first time you made one of those infamous flights over the hump.*

**Horace Barron:** Well, it wasn't anything very exciting until we got up over the snow covered mountain peaks, and then of course the scenery was incredibly beautiful, and it seemed that our plane, which was a DC-3, just ordinary passenger plane, it seemed that it had such difficulty attaining sufficient altitude to clear the Himalayas that the props were actually striking the snow. I don't know if they really were but it seemed like they were.

*Yeah, so during that first flight were you afraid that you were going to hit some of those mountain peaks?*

**Horace Barron:** Was, naturally I wasn't terrified or incapacitated by fear as some people aboard were absolutely out of their minds in fear, but I enjoyed the scenery and I realized that we had already been told that the route that we were taking was known as the aluminum train because so many airplanes had crashed into the mountains along that route that there was just one crashed airplane after another, but I didn't see any of them. They were all snow covered as far as I could tell.

*Yeah. So after you made that first flight, that took you into China at that point?*

**Horace Barron:** Into \_\_\_\_ China.

*Tell us about your thoughts, first you had gone through India which is a completely different world, and now you have flown into China, what was China like?*

**Horace Barron:** China was a very industrious area, lots of people working, nobody begging as we had become accustomed to in India, and people were well fed and well dressed and it seemed a very happy place.

*How were they towards you and your fellow American soldiers?*

**Horace Barron:** They were absolutely wonderful to us. And that pertained throughout my experience in China. They I thought were the very greatest of people because they were so respectful and caring for all of the Americans.

*Once you arrived in China, tell us a little bit about what your base was like and what your normal duties were like.*

**Horace Barron:** I was sent outside of Kun Ming to the infantry training center. I couldn't seem to get away from infantry from the very beginning of my Army experience to then, and we actually underwent some infantry training in Kun Ming, and we were there for about two months before I was finally exposed to some horses. Then about that time, Merrill's marauders was disbanded. It was a fighting unit that originated in India and moved into western Burma, and in an effort to open the old Burma Road that had been the only land route to supply anything to China. Before then, everything that went to China had to go by air. Anyhow, Merrill's marauders had actually connected the new highway from India to the old Burma Road, and Merrill's marauders had depending entirely on horses for transport of their fighting equipment there, their provisions of all kinds.

*I think a lot of people aren't aware of that piece of history and I've had a chance to do some reading up on Merrill's marauders and the tremendous fighting that he and his men did, and the means of transportation there with the horses. Were those horses ones that you brought over from America, or were those horses that you found there in Asia?*

**Horace Barron:** They were natives, and these horses were rather small horses, very few big enough for a man to ride, but they were used under pack saddle to carry supplies all the way from artillery to \_\_\_\_ units.

*Did you find those horses any different or more difficult to treat than horses you were used to back in the United States?*

**Horace Barron:** No, they were very gentle and easy to handle horses, and I was given the command of a small group, I think approximately 30 of Merrill's marauders troops that when they were disbanded, and also about the same number of horses. The oddest incident I guess of my career over there was that I was directed to select four of the men from that group and put all with the 30 horses on a train and take them to a U.S. Army field hospital along the railroad between Kun Ming and Hanoi. Of course the Japs were in Hanoi at the time, and they didn't go all the way into Hanoi, but it went all the way to the end of China border from Kun Ming. So in time I loaded the horses on railroad cars and the four men that I had selected from the group to go with me, and we delivered the horses to this Army Field hospital. It was like they did not call it a MASH unit at that time, but that's what it was, and in the Korean War, they were called MASH units. But I reported to the medical colonel, sir, I have your 30 horses and four men as ordered from Kun Ming, and he had a temper tantrum. He said I don't want any damned horses. Who sent me horses? Why have you delivered horses? I will not let you order them anywhere in my vicinity. I said, well sir, what will I do with them? He said I don't give a damn what you do with them, just get them out of my area. So I took those horses and my four men and we wandered from village to village, seeking food and raising permits for them, and I did not know what to do with them. I left long enough to go back to Kun Ming and ask the theater sergeant who happened at that time to be a veterinarian, I asked him what to do with them, and he said, well just try to keep them alive and keep them fed, and go down to the quartermaster and draw sufficient money to deal with their upkeep. I said, well what would be sufficient money? He said, oh, I'd say \$3 or \$4 million. So I went to the quartermaster and packed a duffle bag full of paper money. Of course at that time, the Chinese dollar, it took about 30 of them to make 1 American dollar. So I had a big bag full of money. And I took that bag and used it as necessary for men and horses. And I would go from place to place with the horses, generally seeking grazing permits from some of the magistrates in the villages, and paying them with horses. Well, I'll give you 3 of our horses for a permit to graze the remainder, and I did that until all my horses were used up. I was never ever asked to account for any of the horses or any of the money.

*That's odd.*

**Horace Barron:** As I say, it was confusion beyond imagination.

*Did you ever find out, sir, why you had been given that order to deliver those horses and why that camp commander didn't want them?*

**Horace Barron:** Nobody knew why I was ordered to deliver them, and of course the medical colonel at this field hospital told me that he was on the railroad and he had no need for pack horses. He would not pack any equipment under any circumstances, and if the Japanese advanced out of Indochina along the railroad, then he would just run like hell and not be slowed down by horses.

*How long, sir, was it that you were there in China? Were you there for a year or so?*

**Horace Barron:** Yeah, I was there for about a year and a half.

*During that time, did you have any contact with your family back home? Did you get mail from them?*

**Horace Barron:** Occasionally we would get mail, a big batch of mail about every two or three months. There would be, my wife wrote to me every day, so when the mail came in, I would usually have 30, 40 or 50 letters to read.

*Wow.*

**Horace Barron:** But mail was hard to send out and even harder to receive.

*When you were in China and the war was raging, did you ever feel like there was any doubt about the outcome?*

**Horace Barron:** I don't think I felt there was doubt about the outcome. I was in remote areas of China and I think I doubted I would ever get out of there. I didn't see how, as confused as everything was, that there could ever be any organized effort to remove us. It seemed like we were just there, at least we were there until the end of the war whenever that would be, and we were in fact there until a few months after Hiroshima.

*Did you get much of the news of the rest of the world besides that mail? Did you know what was going on in terms of the other battles in Europe and the other parts of the Pacific?*

**Horace Barron:** We knew nothing, nothing of how the war was progressing in Europe except when the mail would come through, and there would be newspaper clippings in the mail.

*Do you remember where you were when you learned that the atomic bombs had been dropped and then ultimately when Japan surrendered?*

**Horace Barron:** Yeah, I was in Chikyang, which was the site of the last Japanese/Chinese battle. I watched from afar as the battle was in progress, and the American planes were flying over me and bombing the bases where the battle was in progress. That's where we heard of the atom bomb, and of course we were all delighted.

*I imagine. Did you at first believe it, or did you think that it was a joke that somebody was telling you when they said that the atom bomb had been dropped?*

**Horace Barron:** I think I believed it though I had not anticipated it in any way, but I think I believed it. I know we got the news first by radio.

*So then after you learned that Japan had surrendered, what was it like at that time in China? Was it pretty euphoric for you, or did you immediately have to deal with the Communist insurgency and that sort of thing? Were you caught in any of the middle of that?*

**Horace Barron:** We supposed that we would probably come home by way of the Pacific, that we would likely go to Shanghai, and then head for home out of Shanghai, and of course we were waiting, waiting, waiting for some indication of how we might get out of there, thinking it would be largely on foot, that we would probably be marching East. But then that didn't materialize. There were a few elements of the Army that were further East than I was that did go to Shanghai, but very few. So eventually we had orders to board an aircraft and fly back to Calcutta. So that's the route I went through, Calcutta to a big staging area called Camp Angus, and stayed there about two months waiting for transportation.

*That's a long time to wait.*

**Horace Barron:** A long, tedious wait, and then I boarded in Calcutta the U.S.S. Greely, which was built as a troop ship and had been on several trips back and forth from the United States to Calcutta several times. Anyhow, it brought us back through Suez rather than around Africa like it did.

*Yeah, so that saved you a little bit of time.*

**Horace Barron:** So we came back a little quicker. We were 28 days going and only about 18 days returning I think.

*What was it like when you were able to finally get back home to your wife and I guess the daughter that you had not yet seen?*

**Horace Barron:** I had not yet been there. She was a cute little girl, a year and a half old by then, and of course it was like heaven. They were living in a little brick house, a real house, lived in a real house. But being able to move into that little brick house with them, it was pure heaven.

*What did your daughter think about you finally being home? Your wife told her I imagine all about you and that sort of thing.*

**Horace Barron:** Well, she had seen pictures of me and she recognized me, and called me daddy, until the first time I gave her an order to do something, and then she rared back and said I really don't recognize you. She had just begun talking.

*Wow, that's amazing, yes sir. Well going back real quick to your time in China, when you were there, did you see any signs of the future division between Chiang Kai Shek's forces and the Communists? Did you see any of that or hear any of those rumors?*

**Horace Barron:** We heard rumors and before we ever pulled out of India, we were getting newspapers and finally learning what was going on in the world, and we knew that the Chinese nationalists were in conflict with the Communists before we ever left India. They were in violent conflict by then.

*But while you were there, you hadn't seen any of that, you just heard some of the rumors.*

**Horace Barron:** No, I didn't see any of it, just read about it and heard about it on the radio during the time we were in India waiting for transportation home.

*Also when you were in China, what was the most difficult part of your job as a veterinarian? Was there any one particular aspect that proved more challenging to you than any other?*

**Horace Barron:** Really there was not much to do that was challenging. We had at one time in the town of Mungsa set up a first aid station where we actually held a clinic where we treated injured horses, horses that had been mostly injured on the mountain trails. Occasionally we'd get a horse that had suffered a gunshot wound, and we had horses the Chinese succeeded in capturing from the Japanese, occasionally horses that had been pretty well scraped up in battle, just wounds that we treated. But there were very few of those, and that little clinic that we had



set up, that was a short duration. Everything was a short duration over there. You start one thing and it would always be interrupted by a change of location. Of course when I first got there, the Chinese Nationalist Army was pretty much in retreat, so we were always in retreat. They called it the Chinese defensive campaign, and eventually they turned it around and it became an offensive campaign, but it took a long time for us to quit retreating.

*How were your provisions in terms of being able to treat the horses? Did you have the medicines you needed to treat them?*

**Horace Barron:** No, we had almost nothing, and well, the only real effective thing that we had was the result of an accident. We had an airplane crash in our vicinity that was carrying a load of sulfonamide – sulfol was the miracle drug of the time before penicillin, and sulfanilamide that we recovered from the wreckage of this airplane was our principle medication, and it was a miracle drug to fight infection. We didn't just use it on the horses. We made it available to the people. We had lots of people coming back to get sulfanilamide from us as long as we had our little clinic operating.

*That's amazing. Sir, when you got back home and were reunited with your family, did you go back to work as a veterinarian in Texas?*

**Horace Barron:** Yeah, I did, went back into veterinary practice immediately in Corpus Christi, Texas, and stayed there for only a short time when one of my old teachers visited with me and persuaded me to come to work for him in the college at A&M. So I became a teacher for about 5 years before I went back into general practice, and that was in Taylor, Texas, which is now my home after years and years later.

*I imagine you've seen Taylor and the whole area change a lot since you first got there.*

**Horace Barron:** Oh yeah. I first got to Taylor in 1950, the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1950. I remember the first 4<sup>th</sup> of July that I spent in Taylor, and it is so totally different today than it was then, although I didn't stay here continually. I spent 20 years here and went back to teaching at College Station, Texas, at A&M, and then I went from there to the University of Tennessee in a teaching job, and spent 20 years there. So I've been knocking about quite a bit.

*Yes sir, and I understand, too, sir, you are still very close with many veterans you served with over there in the India/China/Burma Theater and you are active in their alumni association.*

**Horace Barron:** Well, since I joined the CBI veteran's association 20 years ago, it's a chapter in Austin, Texas, and nearly, I wouldn't say, I almost said nearly 100 percent, but it's probably only about 80 percent of the members back in 1989 have died. There are not very many of us left.

*Yes sir, well that's why, part of the reason why it's such an honor for us to be able to interview you today and why we wanted to save your story and your memories, all the details you still recall. Before we started this interview, you thought maybe you wouldn't remember a lot, but I think you remember quite a bit and it's great for us to be able to save your story for posterity. Our hope is that future generations will be able to hear this interview one day and learn from it. I know we've taken up quite a bit of your time, so I'll ask one last question. If there's one thing that you would want to say to future generations or people that might be listening to this*

*interview years from now, is there anything you'd want to say to them or you'd want to impart to them?*

**Horace Barron:** Well, I'm at a loss to say anything wise. I don't know. I just hope that they'll always remember what a wonderful country they have inherited through the effort of some incredible people.

*Yes sir, absolutely. Well sir, we think you're one of them, and I know on behalf of everybody at the General Land Office from Commissioner Patterson, all the employees here and myself, we're deeply honored by your service and thank you for letting us interview you today, and like I mentioned before, we'll be making copies of this for you and we'll send it to you on disk. If you want any extra copies, just let me know and so I'll get that out to you as soon as we have those made up. If you ever have any questions or need anything, feel free to give me a call.*

**Horace Barron:** OK, thank you very much.

*Yes sir, thank you.*

**Horace Barron:** I'm sorry I've been so incoherent.

*No, you haven't. This was a great interview. I really enjoyed it and feel like we learned a lot and we'll call you soon, sir, and let you know we'll be sending those disks to you as well of this interview.*

**Horace Barron:** OK.

*Yes sir. All right, have a great day, sir, take care.*

*[End of recording]*